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Catholic Physicians' Guild

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BOOK REVIEWS

Sex and Gender

Mark F. Schwartz, Sc.D.; Albert S. Moraczewski, O.P., Ph.D.;
and James A. Monteleone, M.D., Editors

The Pope John Center, St. Louis, Missouri, 1983, xvi + 386 pp., \$19.95.

Sex and Gender is a compendium of scientific findings on the development of human sexuality, taken from animal and human studies, and a critical commentary by traditional Christian philosophers and theologians on the implicit and explicit ethical inferences of the scientist-contributors.

The contributors to this exchange between the scientific and theological communities are experts in their respective disciplines: sociology, psychology, psychiatry, anthropology, endocrinology, philosophy, and moral theology. Consequently, it is not a book for casual reading; it requires close attention, especially for those fields in which a reader's background is rather cursory. The scientific essays will be no problem for the physician or the reader with a fairly strong background in biological science. However, the conference originally was suggested by a number of bishops who expressed the need for a better comprehension of the scientific data on human sexuality. This readership, as well as any professional concerned with sexual development and sexual ethics, but lacking expertise in biological science, would have been helped by a "translation" of highly specific technical scientific terms and data into language more comprehensible to the "layman." Some authors of the chapters of reflection on the scientists' essays do begin with a review of the scientific findings, which is of some help in this regard.

Because of the book's scope of academic disciplines, its critical review is a tall order. The scientific writers generally are measured and cautious in their scientific conclusions. But as Dominican Fathers Moraczewski and Ashley point out in the introduction and first chapter, some of the decisions and conclusions of the behavioral scientists, particularly the psychological normality of homosexual orientation, the moral neutrality of homosexual behavior, and sex reassignment surgery, are based not simply on research data, but upon nonempirical assumptions, and at times, on shaky logic. Father Ashley's chapter provides a succinct yet penetrating Catholic theological view of sexuality, and delineates the differing philosophic assumptions of the traditional moral theologian and the empirical researcher as represented in this volume.

Freud conceptualized human sexuality in terms of physical and psychological characteristics. But only in more recent times have researchers teased apart the many factors and functions—physiological and psychological, innate and acquired—which mutually interact in constituting an individual's developing sexuality.

The biological factors are genetic or chromosomal sex, gonadal sex, phenotypic sex (e.g., ambiguous genitalia), and, for want of a better term, "brain sex," that is, the prenatal hormonal masculinization or feminization of certain neural pathways in the brain and central nervous system which affect cognitive as well as sexual behavior. Psychological dimensions of sexuality ignore core gender identity, gender role, and sexual orientation, all of which develop postnatally.

The scientists grapple with the question, to what extent do genetic and prenatal factors on the one hand, and postnatal influences on the other, contribute to an individual's developing sexuality, and how are they mediated? The common thread among the scientists' conclusion, which John Bancroft, M.D., reservedly assesses as "informed speculation" (p. 104), is that the various factors interact in a complex, reciprocal manner, the exact nature of which is still unknown. Anita Ehrhardt, Ph.D., proposes a transactional model in which constitutional and learned factors continuously interact through adolescence in promoting statistically normal or deviant sexuality. The authors are in agreement that prenatal factors may dispose toward, but do not ordain the direction of psychic sexuality. They favor the conclusion of researchers like John Money who sees the possibility of prenatal predisposition making an individual vulnerable to problematic psychosexual identity, role behavior, and/or orientation, but recognizes the extraordinary and more potent influence of postnatal social experience.

Mark F. Schwartz, Sc.D., reviews the data presented by the behavioral scientist contributors to end the nature-nurture, biology-versus-learning debate regarding human sexuality. He argues that the debate is an artificial result of dichotomizing genetic and prenatal biochemical influences from postnatal environmental, social influences. However, it appears that in his biosocial perspective as peacemaker, Dr. Schwartz becomes too reductionistic. For example, his statement, "Anything encoded into the central nervous system from a postnatal social determinant is as much a biological determinant as are genetic and other prenatal influences" (p. 312ff.). On this premise even one's self-concept and philosophy of life, once encoded, become a biological determinant. It confuses a higher cognitive process with its biological substrate.

There is also an occasional Homeric nod by the philosophic critics. This reviewer is puzzled by Father Moraczewski's conclusion that the evidence of gender dysphoria allows only the remote possibility that objectively sex and gender are not absolutely coupled in transsexuals (p. 303). The clinical evidence is convincing that, in some persons, psychic sex is a total mismatch with anatomical sex.

The science chapters of the book provide a thorough and exacting review of the research on biological, prenatal factors affecting sexuality. A shortcoming is that there is little specific material from studies in clinical and developmental psychology on the correlation of certain kinds of life experiences with normal or problematic sexuality. Nor is there any behavioral scientist among the contributors whose empirically or ethically based views disagree with their colleagues' position that homosexuality is simply a normal variant of human sexuality, another option for sexual expression. This point gets passing recognition in Chapter 14, a summary of the general discussion among all participants. Some scientists demur on the "one-sided" conclusions and theories on sex and gender presented by the scientific participants. The reservation, however, is dismissed summarily on the ground that the main opposition is from psychoanalytic practitioners whose data "have come almost exclusively from persons who have some kind of psychological problem" (p. 359). It is argued that the data of the scientific contributors to the book come from normal populations, which seems to mean persons who do not seek psychotherapy for sexual difficulties. If we apply this criterion to all clinical data, consistency would require we bypass any research-based opinion on diagnostic categories drawn from persons in treatment, and use only data from persons not particularly conflicted about their internal feelings or overt behaviors. There is, in fact, a considerable number of behavioral scientists and clinicians who see homosexuality, for example, as dysfunctional. One wonders why some representative of this position, like psychiatrists Charles Socarides or Ruth Barnhouse, was not included in the symposium. As it stands, the book leaves the reader who is not already knowledgeable concerning the topics it treats to conclude there is

fair unanimity within the scientific and psychotherapeutic communities on the normalcy and potential adaptiveness of homosexuality.

Nonetheless, this volume is a unique contribution to the literature on sex and gender in that it brings together expert scientific and traditional Christian ethical commentators on the awesome mystery of human sexuality. It provides a manual of recent research on prenatal dispositional factors which probably interact with later environmental learning in the establishment of gender identity, sex role behaviors and sexual orientation. The scientific essays — Dr. John Bancroft's deserves special mention — contain many insightful cautions against facile interpretations of the data and extrapolations from animal studies. Some generally held theories are called into question by recent research, for example, the Masters and Johnson research findings which contest sexual fantasy as the surest indicator of orientation.

The scientific contributors, perhaps unwittingly, show that though science is value-free, scientists rarely are. Among the scientist contributors only June Reinisch, Ph.D., sticks to her last and simply presents research findings. But as Marie Jahoda remarks in her treatise on concepts of mental health, scientists who deal with human persons cannot escape the "value dilemma." Putting it another way, Father John Harvey poses the pivotal issue: is our only source of knowledge about human sexuality empirical? (Cf. p. 344.) Science tells us what is. But whether what is is humanly appropriate is a philosophic question. Scientists surely may and must take philosophic positions, but these require assessment on philosophic grounds. The reflective essays by the philosopher and theologian contributors help the medical, psychological and pastoral therapist to sharpen this assessment.

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Bioethics and Belief

by John Mahoney

Christian Classics, Westminster, Md, 1984, 127 pp., \$8.95, paperback.

For reasons that will be given later, I found it necessary, when reading this book, to put it aside several times so that I could walk about and cool off because of the irritation that it aroused in me.

The author is an English Jesuit who lectures on moral and pastoral theology at Heythrop College in the University of London. The book is quite well written, thoughtful and provocative, and on the surface one that manifests a wide acquaintance with the major moral and social questions posed by recent developments in the life sciences. The questions taken up are those of human fertility control, death and dying, the beginning of human life, medical research and experimentation, and the interrelationship between belief and medical science. In summarizing and commenting on the volume, I will focus on the issues of human fertility control, the beginning of human life, and human experimentation.

Under the heading of human fertility control, Mahoney includes a discussion of

what he terms positive interventions, namely those intended to bring new human life into being, and of what he terms negative interventions, those intended to inhibit conception. Mahoney argues that artificial insemination by the husband and the use of in vitro fertilization to alleviate the infertility of a married couple who provide the gametic materials for the procedures are both morally acceptable. He claims that opposition to these medical interventions is based either on an excessively static understanding of human persons and of natural law or else on a religiously based appeal to the "mystery" of marriage and procreation as willed and intended by God, an appeal that cannot stand up under critical scrutiny. He flatly asserts that "no answer appears to be forthcoming" to the question of "why it is that only loving marital intercourse may be the context and cause of human procreation" (p. 16). Although he expresses some grave concerns over the use of donor sperm and/or ova for either artificial insemination or in vitro fertilization, he in no way shuts the door to the possible moral rightness of such procedures. In addition, he sees no reason why married couples may not freeze and store, not only sperm and ova, but also embryos brought into being for future implantation and gestation. With respect to contraception, he acknowledges that the Church still claims that this is an intrinsically disordered activity, but he thinks that this position, one based primarily on a "frustrated faculty" type of argument (cf. p. 24ff), has little probative value and that it is quite reasonable for married couples to choose contraceptives and sterilizing means if there are serious reasons for avoiding pregnancies.

In his chapter on the beginnings of human life, Mahoney devotes considerable attention to an analysis of the 1974 Vatican Declaration of Abortion, a declaration which acknowledged the freedom of Catholics and others to speculate on the precise moment when a new human person comes into being while insisting that, for practical purposes, one must regard human life from conception onwards with the utmost respect. Mahoney's own position is that it is highly unlikely that there is, in being, a human person from the time of conception-fertilization. He believes that this position is supported both by scientific evidence and by philosophical reasoning. The scientific evidence he finds most pertinent is that dealing with twinning and recombination, both of which are possible prior to cell differentiation. The philosophical argument he finds most supportive of his position is that developed by Joseph Donceel in his celebrated article on delayed hominization, in which Donceel attempted to show that the Thomistic theory of successive ensoulments in prenatal life is correct. As a result of his position on the beginning of human life, Mahoney concludes that abortion prior to cell differentiation can hardly be regarded as homicide. While granting that the being destroyed by abortion at this stage has the "promise" of personal life, he maintains that various serious reasons can be advanced to justify abortion at this time.

In his chapter on human experimentation, Mahoney, developing his ideas about the beginning of human life, argues that nontherapeutic experiments on early embryos, which he designates as "human biological nodes" (p. 98), can properly be carried out. And obviously his views on the beginning of human life are relevant to his claim, noted previously, that it is morally proper to freeze and store early embryos.

These are some of the major claims made by Mahoney in his work. My irritation over the work arose not so much because he took these positions — he is hardly original in doing so — but rather because of the onesidedness of his presentation. In discussing contraception, for instance, he merely repeats the well-worn arguments that have been stated and restated over and over again since the debates of the mid-1960s. Not once in his discussion of contraception does he even indicate that the type of reasoning he employs has been subjected to criticism — devastating in my judgment — by numerous authors, including John Finnis and Elizabeth Anscombe of England, Germain G. Grisez, Joseph Boyle, John Kippley

and many others in the United States, and, not least, Karol Wojtyla, formerly of Cracow and presently reigning as Pope John Paul II. Not once, in his discussion of contraception, does he ever come to terms with the strong moral arguments developed by these writers, nor does he ever give consideration to the value of periodic abstinence and of natural family planning methods.

Similarly, in discussing artificial insemination by the husband and in vitro fertilization he totally ignores the very weighty arguments against these procedures developed by such writers as John Finnis, Paul Ramsey, Leon Kass and others. He facetiously asserts, as noted earlier, that "no answer appears to be forthcoming" to the question "why it is that only loving marital intercourse may be the context of human procreation." Despite this assertion, I submit that some weighty answers have *already been* advanced, and that Mahoney simply chooses to ignore them in his discussion of the subject.

Similarly, in his long discussion of the beginnings of human life, he builds on the same evidence (twinning and recombination) and philosophical argument (Donceel) that numerous writers of the same persuasion have advanced in the past decade. But he completely fails to take into account the substantive answers that have been made both to the significance of this evidence and to the argument of Donceel, answers set forth by such writers as Germain G. Grisez, Benedict Ashley, Francis Wade, Thomas Hilgers, Baruch Brody, and many others.

In sum, Mahoney provides no new arguments for the positions he adopts. His comments on contraception are simply warmed-over comments of Haring, Curran, et al., tirelessly asserting that the teaching of the Church is rooted in a static, impersonal understanding of the natural law. Since this claim has been so devastatingly rebutted by the authors cited previously, it is incredible that Mahoney can think that repetition of the same stale arguments is sufficient to establish his position. Likewise, his arguments to justify in vitro fertilization and husband artificial insemination merely repeat the types of arguments advanced for the former by McCormick and others and the line of reasoning adopted by Haring, Curran and others for the latter, without even attempting to take into account the counter-arguments advanced by the writers already noted. And the same is true for his discussion of the beginning of human life.

Although many of the positions taken by Mahoney are clearly contrary to the teaching of the Church (e.g., his views on in vitro fertilization, contraception, and the respect to be given human life from its conception), the work nonetheless carries an imprimatur. But, as we have learned from experience (e.g., the imprimatur given to Philip Keane's *Sexual Morality* and subsequently removed at the demand of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), imprimaturs are no longer sure guides to the conformity of a book's teaching to that of the Church.

While the book is, as already noted, well written and, on the surface, sophisticated and urbane, I find it seriously deficient. Mahoney's failure to consider strong counter-arguments to the positions he advances might lead readers to conclude that there are no strong arguments to be made. This conclusion is definitely false, and in my opinion, it is simply not scholarly for Catholic authors like Mahoney to write as though these counter-arguments do not exist. He, and others like him, have the responsibility, if they wish to hold the views they do, to face their critics head on and answer their arguments. Mahoney, by failing to do so, does a disservice to scholarship and to his readers, at least in my judgment. His failure to do so surely makes his own efforts lose their appeal to credibility.

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